

**Anthropology 340: Medical Anthropology**  
**Contemporary Issues in US Healthcare from the Anthropology Perspective**  
**College of Charleston**  
**Spring 2012**

<b>INSTRUCTOR:</b> Virginia Nichols, MD 19 St. Phillip St. Nichols.virginia@gmail.com Phone 843-953-5738	<b>OFFICE HOURS:</b> Tuesdays 10-12. 88 Wentworth Room 103 Email to make an appointment at this or other times.  <b>CLASS HOURS:</b> Tuesday, Thursday 5:30 to 8:15 PM in Maybank 119 from January 9 to February 23, 2012. <b>Exam :</b> The final exam is on February 28, 2012
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**Introduction**

This class will bring the perspective of anthropology to health care in the US. We will briefly review the major components of healthcare delivery and then shift to analyses of contemporary issues that students are likely to encounter in daily life and in the popular media. The course will be conducted as a seminar with emphasis on class participation and written reflection on the discussions. The readings will include journalism, fiction, biographies and autobiographies. Students will accumulate a portfolio of short written pieces, opinion essays, interviews, and critiques during the semester.

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

- Establish a basic knowledge of how the US system of health care reflects contemporary culture values and themes.
- Understand the interaction of health outcomes, income, race, gender and geography.
- Be able to critically evaluate news coverage of issues in healthcare.
- Formulate and defend opinions on controversial issues using the perspectives of the patient, the provider and the payer.
- Practice interviewing about healthcare experiences.
- Learn about the roles for medical anthropologists in the healthcare system.

**COURSE MATERIALS**

The assigned readings may not be available on OAKS until the class is underway. The syllabus and the readings can be found at <http://sociology.cofc.edu/about/faculty-staff-listing/nichols-virginia.php>.

The following readings and course materials will be available on the above website in a .PDF format:

[Sobo Culture and meaning in health services research.pdf](#)

[Brown and Barrett selections Understanding and Applying Medical Anthropology.pdf](#)  
[Duke Alum Article on Student Health.pdf](#)  
[McElroy and Townsend selections Medical Anthropology in Ecological Perspective.pdf](#)

Please obtain these books that are available through Amazon as paperbacks and/or downloads:

[Better](#) by Atul Gawande  
[My Own Country](#) by Adam Verghese  
[Mountains Upon Mountains](#) by Tracy Kidder  
[The House of God](#) by Samuel Shem

We will also use readings from the books below. I will email the selections to you until they can be posted on OAKS.

[Medical Anthropology in Ecological Perspective](#) by McElroy and Townsend  
[Culture and meaning in Health Services Research](#) by Sobo  
[Understanding and Applying Medical Anthropology](#) by Brown and Barrett

We will use articles published in the New Yorker by Atul Gawande.  
We will also discuss articles from online and print media (New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Charleston News and Courier and others).

### **CLASS ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION**

Your presence in class is important. Your grade will be affected by both your participation in class and your subsequent written reflections on the class discussions and presentations.

It is important that you come to class prepared so that you can participate knowledgably. You will be reading, looking up information, and writing about what you have found throughout the short semester. The burden of work outside of class will not be great, but you will need to keep up. The books are entertaining and should not be overly time consuming, but you will need to begin reading them early in the course.

Be very careful to document any material you have downloaded. Do this by stating the source in the text of what you are writing and use quotation marks. At the end of the written piece, list the sources for your information.

I expect that you will continue to develop your opinions about the class material through discussions with other people. However, you need to write the synthesis of what you think about the topic on your own.

If you encounter medical problems during the semester that cause you to have chronic attendance problems, you can contact the Director of Undergraduate Academic Services (953-5674) to arrange a Medical Withdrawal from the class.

## **Written Work**

Your written commentary on the class discussions should average 3-5 pages a week, though more is fine. This is informal opinion writing-similar to a blog. You can revise a submitted commentary, but submit the original and have the revision done by the next class. You should have about 20-30 pages in your portfolio by the end of the course. Written work should be double-spaced and typed in 12 point font with 1-inch margins. Please proofread and edit your paper before turning it in.

## **COMMUNICATION DEVICES**

If you have access to a laptop, you may find it useful in some of the sessions. When you come to class please be sure to silence your communication devices.

## **DISABILITIES**

Students with documented disabilities should talk with me personally at the beginning of the semester to make necessary accommodations.

## **GRADING**

Your grade will be arrived at by amassing points through the semester. All of the activities (class participation, presentations, written reflections, opinion essays and interviews) will carry points.

Grades will be cumulative and based on:

Participation in class AND commentary on the topics discussed in class 40%

Mastery of two topic areas (presentations) 30%

Interview of a health care recipient 10%

Book critique 10%

Exams 10%

## **STUDENT HONOR CODE**

Lying, cheating, attempted cheating, and plagiarism are violations of our Honor Code that, when identified, are investigated. Each instance is examined to determine the degree of deception involved.

Cases of suspected academic dishonesty will be reported directly to the Dean of Students. A student found responsible for academic dishonesty will receive a XF in the course, indicating failure of the course due to academic dishonesty. This grade will appear on the student's transcript for two years after which the student may petition for the X to be expunged. The student may also be placed on disciplinary probation, suspended (temporary removal) or expelled (permanent removal) from the College by the Honor Board.

It is important for students to remember that unauthorized collaboration--working together without permission-- is a form of cheating. Unless a professor specifies that students can work together on an assignment and/or test, no collaboration is permitted. Other forms of cheating include possessing or using an unauthorized study aid (such as a PDA), copying from another's exam, fabricating data, and giving unauthorized assistance.

Remember, research conducted and/or papers written for other classes cannot be used in whole or in part for any assignment in this class without obtaining prior permission from the professor.

You can find a complete version of the Honor Code and all related processes in the *Student Handbook* at <http://studentaffairs.cofc.edu/honor-system/studenthandbook/index.php>.

## SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND CLASS ACTIVITIES

### General structure of the classes:

Discussion of the reading for this session  
Reflection on previous session's reading (with written commentary)  
Review health issues reported in the media  
Presentation of a current issue or topic  
Write exam questions  
Group prep for the next week's presentation-what data are needed?

### Some classes will include:

Interviews  
Discussion of the books

### Week 1 January 10 and 12

Topic	Review the course objectives and the syllabus Define "medical anthropology" Generate a list of topics for presentations
Preparation	Look up "medical anthropology" on Wikipedia Start Gawande <a href="#">Better</a>
Topic	Overview of healthcare institutions Where do medical anthropologists fit into the health care system? Assign presentations
Preparation	Sobo, Chapter 5, pages 83-99 Start Verghese <a href="#">My Own Country</a>

### Week 2 January 17 and 19

Topic	Access to health care. Is health care a right? How is health care triaged? Ethics for health policy
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Healthcare at the extremes (prematurity and end of life)  
Presentations

Preparation Gawande, New Yorker August 2, 2010  
Gawande [Better](#)  
Online research on organ transplant policies  
Read The Hot Spotters by Gawande  
[http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2011/01/24/110124fa\\_fact\\_gawande](http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2011/01/24/110124fa_fact_gawande)

Read New York Times article on immigrant hospitalization  
[www.nytimes.com/.../nowhere-to-go-patients-linger-in-hospitals-at-a-](http://www.nytimes.com/.../nowhere-to-go-patients-linger-in-hospitals-at-a-)

### **Week 3 January 24 and 26**

Topic Disparities in health outcomes: the impact of geography, income, employment, race, gender and disease.  
Rationing  
Presentations

Preparation Sobo, Chapter 6, pages 101-105  
Online research on disability policies, immigrant health care  
Start Kidder [Mountains Upon Mountains](#)

### **Week 4 January 31 and February 2**

Topic How are diseases created and categorized?  
“Culture Bound syndromes”  
Cultural Competence  
Disease Beliefs  
How are beliefs linked to policy and funding?  
Interviewing  
Presentations

Preparation Marcia Angell articles on depression in the New York Review of Book  
LA Times series on autism  
Sobo, Chapter 6, pages 106-122  
Brown and Barrett, Chapter 29, pages 269-271  
McElroy, Chapter 7, pages 267-298  
Kidder [Mountains Upon Mountains](#)

Topic The patient’s role in health  
Patient rights  
Patient safety  
Privacy and confidentiality, electronic medical records  
Should preventive health be enforced? (vaccinations, helmets, seat belts)

Presentations

Preparation Online research on patient rights, patient advocacy groups, vaccination policy  
Online research on the Open Notes Project, Annals of Internal Medicine  
[www.annals.org/content/153/2/121.full](http://www.annals.org/content/153/2/121.full)

**Week 5 February 7 and 9**

Topic The care provider's role in health care  
Training and socialization into roles  
Healthcare marketing

Preparation Finish Gawande, Better  
Finish Verghese, My Own Country  
Selectons (TBA) from Shem, House of God

**Week 6 February 14 and 16**

Topic The payer's role in health care  
Health Insurance

Preparation Online research on the Healthcare Affordability Act and Accountable Care  
Organizations  
Read The Cost Conundrum by Gawande  
[http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2009/06/01/090601fa  
\\_fact\\_gawande](http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2009/06/01/090601fa_fact_gawande)

**Week 7 February 21 and 23**

Topic Discussion of the books  
Review of major themes

Preparation Book Critique  
Write exam questions

**Week 8 Final Exam February 28**